

Six practical examples that faculty can implement now in their Blackboard Learn course content and electronic documents to benefit all learners and improve accessibility.

Introduction

The three stand-out best practices for the exemplary course include (1) accessible course content, (2) use of technology, and (3) instructor availability and communication. It is the first best practice that is the focus of this Poster Session: accessible course content. Course reviewers' comments:

"...for students with different abilities to feel welcome and capable in the course is tremendous. Nicely done inclusion techniques!!!"

"...it is evident that the instructor took great care to be accommodating to students on a variety of ways ~ including those that are visually impaired...very well done!"

"Well done learner support with many types and inclusion of modals of instructions for all students."

"...you've included heading styles, screen-readable tables, high contrast colors, and documents in various file formats ~ all to ensure readability by students!"

"...she seemed to be in-tune with how students consume their information."



Purpose and scope

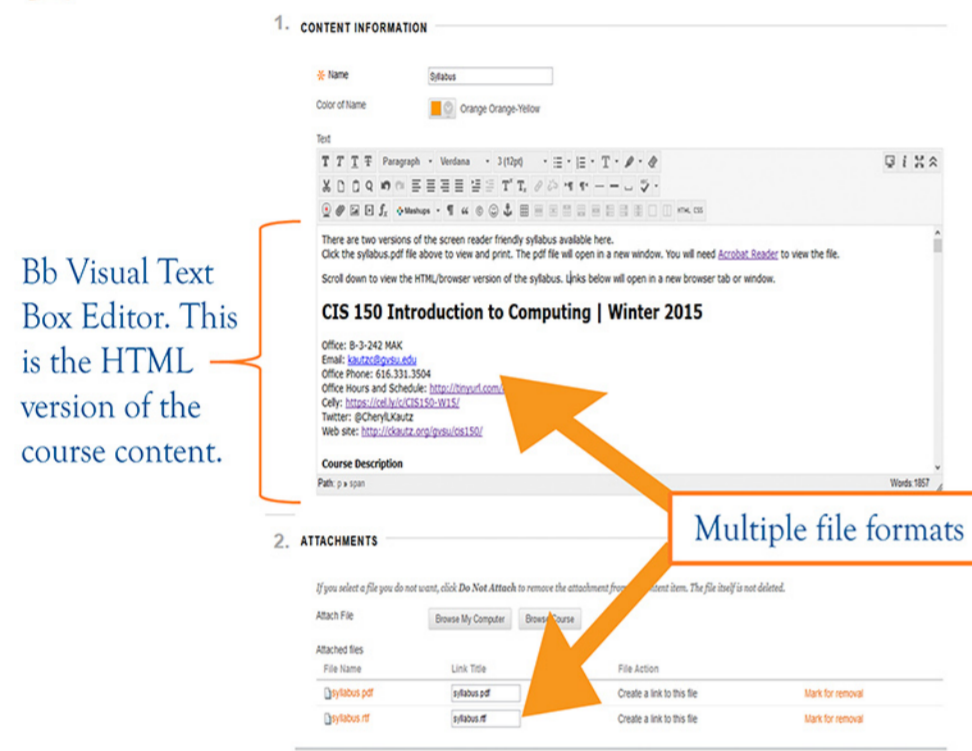
The purpose of this Poster Session is to present just a few of the practical examples that faculty can implement now in their Blackboard Learn course content to benefit all learners and improve accessibility. The specific emphasis here is on the faculty course content within the Blackboard Learn Visual Text Box Editor and MS Word 2010 or 2013 documents.

Relevance

Universal design in education makes learning inclusive for all students. It includes course content that is usable and understood by a wide range of people, including those that may have a disability. Universally designed content recognizes the reality of diversity and gives all individuals equal opportunities to learn.

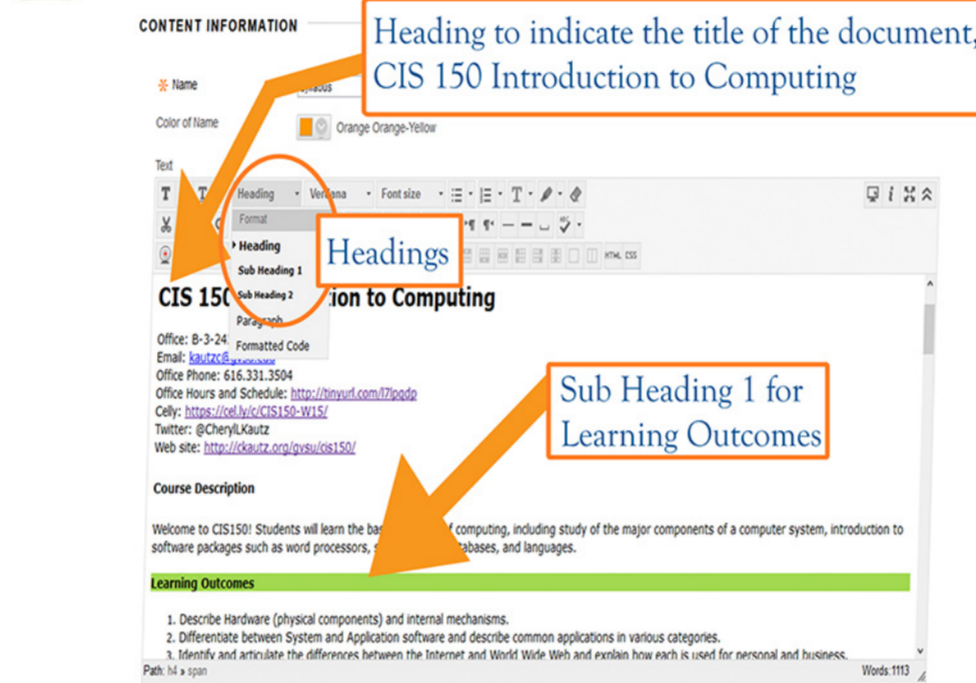
Practical Examples

1 Multiple file formats



Course content, including syllabus, rubrics, etc. should be available in multiple file formats to help ensure all students will be able to access the information with their respective technologies. In the Blackboard content screen capture above, the syllabus is available in PDF, RTF, and HTML. The HTML content in the Blackboard Visual Text Box Editor is easily navigated by screen readers (when written with proper structure) and does not require additional software to view, making it the most accessible type of content for all students.

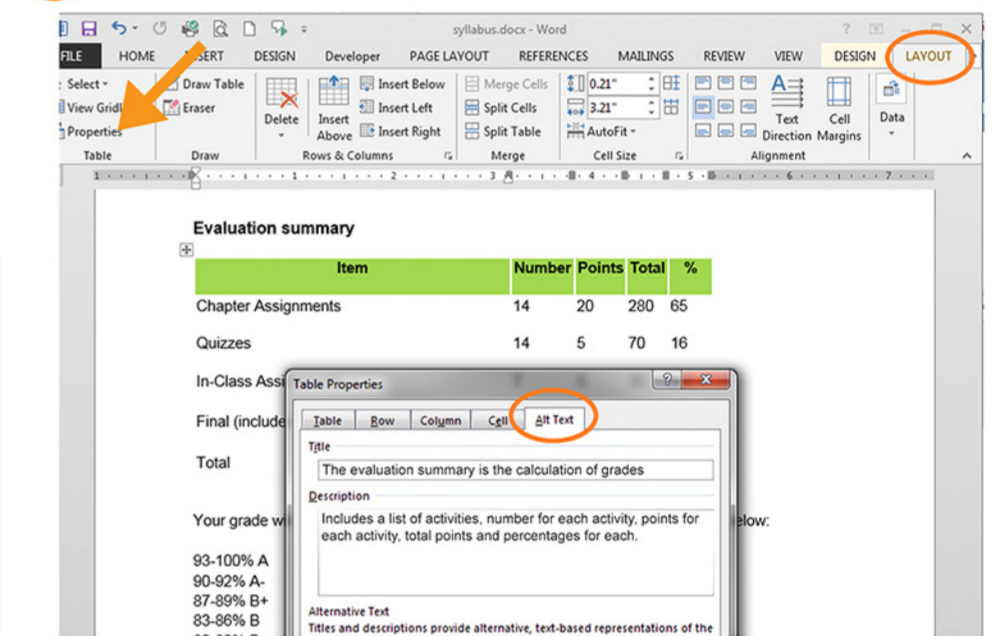
2 Structure content with headings



A hierarchy of headings to divide content into well-structured, logical, easily digested segments is beneficial for everyone. The screen capture above shows content in the Blackboard Visual Text Box Editor structured properly: **Heading** is the most important and used for the title, **Sub Headings 1 and 2** indicate the next levels down. A student using a screen reader can use shortcut keys to bring up a list of these Headings and then use arrow keys to navigate to the desired section. Without headings, a visually impaired student may need to listen to the entire document to find specific information.

In MS Word documents, Headings in the Styles group on the Home tab should be used to structure documents in the same way.

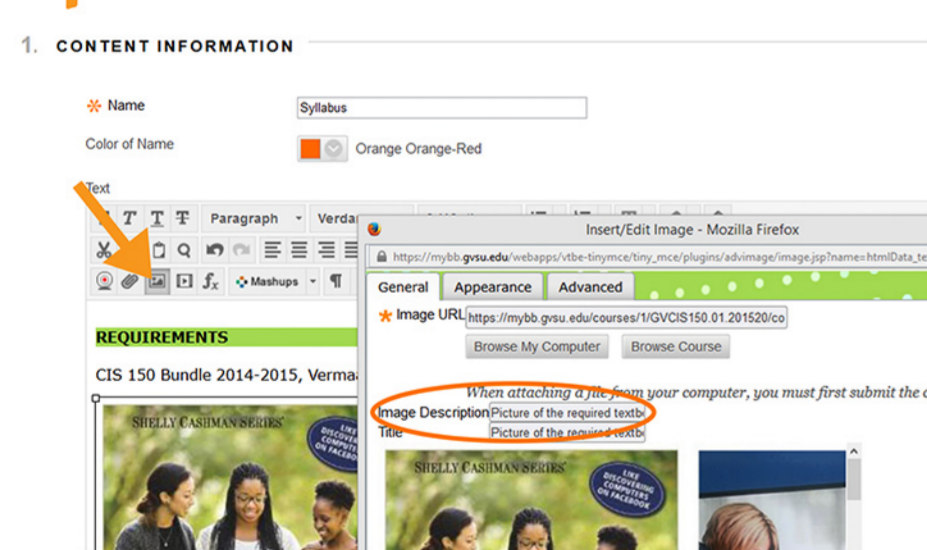
3 Tables



Tables are another way to structure content, display, and organize information. A summary, explanatory caption, or alt text may be beneficial to help students understand the table. Alt Text in MS Word is used to describe the table and read out loud in a screen reader. To add alt text, refer to the MS Word screen capture above. Place the insertion point in the table and click the Properties button on the Layout tab.

Note: copy and paste a MS Word table into a Blackboard Visual Text Box Editor and notice the alt text translates to a **Summary Attribute** in the HTML, which is also read out loud in a screen reader.

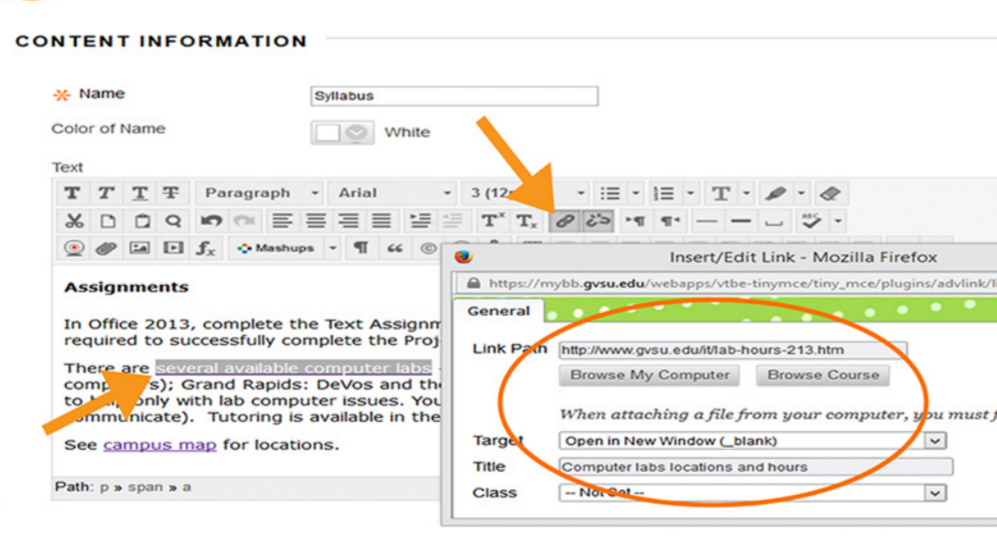
4 Images



Images can increase comprehension and usability for most students. However, without alternative (alt) text, a visually impaired person does not know what the image is or the purpose of it. The alt attribute specifies alternate text for an image. When the reader comes to the alt text, the screen reader conveys the meaning of the image. In Blackboard's content window shown above, click the **Insert/Edit Image** button and then enter descriptive text in the **Image Description** text box. The Image Description is the alt text.

In MS Word 2010 documents, right-click the image, choose **Format Picture**, and then click **Alt Text**. In Word 2013 documents, right-click the image, choose **Format Picture**, click the **Layout & Properties** button, and then click **Alt Text**.

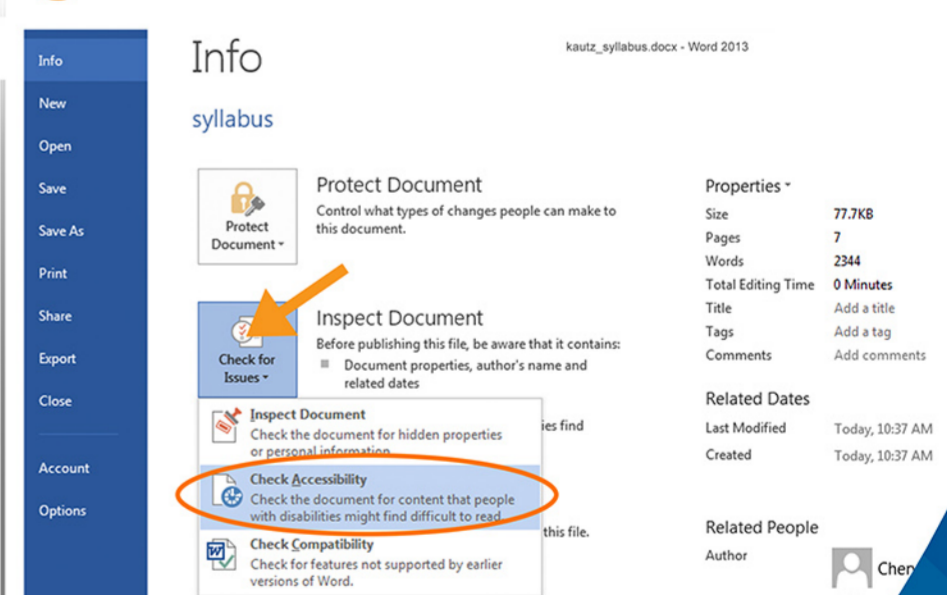
5 Hyperlinks



Consider creating hyperlinks to allow all students, including those using a screen reader, to easily access information. To get started, enter a Blackboard content area as shown above. Next, select the text, click the **Insert/Edit Link** button, and then type the URL (Web site address) in the **Link Path** text box. **Title** text may be added, but is not vital when the link is descriptive. Fewer frames may increase usability; click the **Target** drop-down menu and choose **Open in New Window (_blank)**.

In MS Word documents, select the text, click the **Insert** tab, and then click the **Hyperlink** button. Type the URL in the **Address** text box and descriptive text in the **Text to display** text box.

6 MS Word's accessibility checker



MS Word's Check Accessibility tool can help to identify issues such as missing alt text, extra spaces that may be misinterpreted by a screen reader, etc. To check your MS Word document, click **File** on the Ribbon. Next, on the **Info** tab, click **Check for Issues** button and then choose **Check Accessibility** from the menu.

Note: this tool is currently available on PC only, not Mac.

